



Exercise 3.9

Background and Discussion Questions for Case Study 18



Case Study 18: Stakeholders in the Planning and Zoning Process in Georgia provides an in-depth illustration of land-use decisions. The following background and discussion questions will allow your participants to explore the challenges and complexities of public participation in land-use planning and zoning decisions.

Objective: Participants will be able to apply new strategies and approaches to their own involvement in the land-use decision-making process.

Materials:

Presentation 5

Case Study 18: Stakeholders in the Planning and Zoning Process in Georgia

Time: 75 minutes

Background

Case Study 18: Stakeholders in the Planning and Zoning Process in Georgia depicts many of the land-use conflicts occurring throughout the rural United States during the past few decades, reflecting broad social and economic changes. Embedded within debates over development are conflicts over property rights and the role of the government in promoting or regulating certain economic actions. Many rural places such as Harris County, Georgia, sit at the uneasy crossroads of traditional, natural resource-based economies, where the land base was valued according to its productivity in agriculture and forestry, and the “new” economies where ex-urbanites migrate to the countryside and value the land for its natural and aesthetic beauty. This is often referred to as the “cows versus condos” debate. In many places these competing economies are at odds. Interestingly, in western Georgia, stakeholders have joined forces, and what have been seen as fundamentally different views and valuations of the landscape are being used jointly to direct land-use policy.

One of the most common reasons for fighting high-density, residential development in Harris County is the loss of rural character. This is cited by both the long-term residents with family history linked to timber and agriculture, and the newer ex-urbanites, who are moving into upscale, large acreage residential developments in the county. In some cases the long-term residents have accepted that some development is inevitable but if it is to come, they would rather have high-end, large-lot developments, rather than high-density, lower-income residential subdivisions. This is the crux of land-use debates in the area. The long-term residents have joined with newer in-migrants to fight the next wave of development which both see as a threat to their quality of life.

Thrown into the mix are developers. The one developer portrayed in this case study has recognized the potential for an alliance between these groups. T. R. Milton has been visibly fighting for the preservation of rural character in Harris County, and at the same time proceeding with a number of efforts for a high-end, low-density, residential development.

This has not necessarily delayed or prevented social and economic change from coming to the county; it has only altered its course. While the older residents of the county may temporarily see a halt to the urban sprawl they are fighting to keep out, many see an eventual rise in property values and taxes that prices them out of the area if development continues for high income ex-urbanites. The sale of their land will open the door to additional development. While population densities may remain low, social and economic changes are inevitable.

For natural resource professionals the implications of ex-urban development are not straight forward. The transition from a timber-and agriculture-dominated landscape to a low-density, residential-dominated landscape has different trade-offs in terms of environmental effects. On the one side there is a reduction in fertilizer and pesticide use in low-density residential areas which may lead to improved water quality. However, increased fragmentation of the landscape has negative consequences for wildlife and ecosystem services. There are also trade-offs regarding vegetative cover. While the amount of clearcut land and forest plantations may be reduced with development, there are problems created with wildfire through lack of active forest management in residentially dominated forests.

So, this case study may raise more questions than answers. It certainly illustrates that different stakeholder groups use the policy process in very different ways, and it also points out how unlikely alliances can form. The questions that are part of this exercise may stimulate discussion.

1. Provide participant with copies of **Case Study 18**. Present the corresponding slides for this exercise from **Presentation 5**.
2. Give them time to read the case, if they have not read it prior to the workshop.
3. Ask some or all of the following discussion questions. You may want to divide your participants into small discussion groups, give them time to discuss each question, and ask each small group to report a response.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you characterize the debate regarding development and land-use change in your area? Do you see any similarities to this case study?
2. Who are all the stakeholders in the case study? Who are the stakeholders in land-use change discussions in your community? How much power do they have?
3. What did the “community-minded” developer in the case study do differently than the out-of-state developer? Why do you think this approach worked?
4. What problems can incremental land-use changes create?
5. How much do discussions about quality of life issues dominate development/urbanization debates as compared to natural resource conditions in your area?

- 6.** How can natural resource and environmental benefits be linked to quality of life? What are the benefits of linking natural resources and quality of life?
- 7.** Who are the most active and visible stakeholders in promoting certain policy positions in your area? Why is stakeholder involvement important in development or zoning decisions?
- 8.** Who are some of the least active stakeholders who potentially could be the most affected by land-use policy changes? How can natural resource professionals facilitate stakeholder involvement? How can they maintain credibility in the midst of a controversial land-use issue?
- 9.** Do you see potential alliances between stakeholders in your area?
- 10.** What roles do developers play in the policy process in your area?
- 11.** Is there a recent example of a controversial land-use issue in your area? How did the public react? Elected officials? Was your agency involved? If so, in what capacity?